

The following is a testimony sent in by a member of the Board of Directors of Independence Northwest, Center for Independent Living.

Greetings. I am Linda Wheeler Donahue of Southbury. I am here today to ask that you restore full funding for Connecticut's Independent Living Centers. Please reject the elimination of funding, restore their budget, and even consider a well-deserved increase.

What do Connecticut's Independent Living Centers mean to me? A whole lot! I look to my ILC not only as a person with a disability but as an ageing senior as well. I grew up in the era of the 1950s when there was a long-standing tradition of institutional or family care as the primary options open to people with disabilities. It was a culture of passive dependency, where we had little control over our own lives and were looked upon with pity rather than treated as equals. Non-disabled professionals told us what was 'best' for us.

That all changed with the birth of the Independent Living Movement in the Seventies. And we are all grateful it did. A shift in thinking took place of major proportions! We decided to revolt, in a way, from the old paternalistic thinking of "we know what's best for you." We decided to take back control of our own lives, to be our own catalysts of change.

My ILC is Independence Northwest of Naugatuck. The professionals at I.N., most with disabilities themselves, work tirelessly with us to facilitate our empowerment. They do this through technology education, through advocacy efforts, and through equipping consumers with independent life skills needed to avoid institutionalization. Most important to me is that they always help us to see ***ourselves as the only real experts*** at defining our needs and requirements because we have the closest possible experience of our disability.

The ILCs, in their staunch commitment to empowering people with disabilities to live as independently as possible, deserve not to have their budge slashed to zero but actually deserve a substantial increase in operating funds. Please keep their vital work in mind when you make your Appropriations decisions.

Frankly, I feel it is a shocking gesture from Governor Malloy to totally eliminate funding for this important feature of life in our state. If you accept this budget cut, you are effectively eliminating a crucial resource for Connecticut's citizens with disabilities.

I exemplify “independent living” every day. I had a 40-year career as a college professor, I am a homeowner who pays taxes and who votes. I am president of The Polio Outreach of Connecticut representing 280 of our state’s polio survivors.

In conclusion, when you meet to vote on this important budgetary issue, I ask that you restore full funding for Connecticut’s Independent Living Centers.

Thank you very much.

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